

## The Senate's Key Interim Charges for the Texas Legislature

The Texas Legislature meets every two years. In the year between, the Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the House appoint interim committees to study important issues. These interim committees hold hearings and take public testimony. Their findings will affect actions taken during the Regular Session of the 85th Texas Legislature which begins January 10, 2017.

The following are key Senate interim charges that could have an impact on people with disabilities. Individuals who wish to provide input on any of these issues can submit written comments directly to the committee involved or attend committee hearings.\*

### State Affairs Committee

- **Guardianship Requirements:** Monitor the implementation of requirements for guardianship legislation and make recommendations needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation.

### Health & Human Services (HHS) Committee

- **Wrongful Birth Effects:** Examine the cause of action known as “wrongful birth.” The study should examine its history in Texas, its effect on the practice of medicine, and its effect on children with disabilities and their families. Examine related measures proposed or passed in other states.
- **Addressing High-Acuity Needs of Foster Care Children:** Study the increase in higher acuity children with trauma and mental illness in the state foster care system, and recommend ways to ensure children have timely access to appropriate treatment and placement options.
- **Healthy Aging Promotion:** Study and make recommendations on innovative methods and best practices to promote healthy aging and reduce chronic medical and behavioral health conditions. Identify opportunities for improved collaboration and promotion for healthy aging in the health and human services system at the state, regional and local levels.
- **Long-Term Care Settings Quality and Oversight:** Examine and recommend ways to improve quality and oversight in long-term care settings, including nursing homes, Intermediate Care Facilities and the Home and Community-based Services program. Monitor the implementation of legislation

related to the revocation of nursing home licenses for repeated serious violations.

- **Medicaid Reform and State Innovation:** Study the impact of the Section 1115 Texas Healthcare Transformation and Quality Improvement Program Waiver on improving health outcomes, reducing costs, and providing access to health care for the uninsured, and monitor the renewal process of the waiver. Explore and recommend other ways to control costs and increase quality and efficiency in the Medicaid program, including the pursuit of a block grant or a Section 1332 Medicaid State Innovation Waiver for the existing Medicaid program.
- **Inpatient Mental Health System Reform:** Study and make recommendations on establishing collaborative partnerships between state-owned mental health hospitals and university health science centers to improve inpatient state mental health services, maximize the state mental health workforce, and reduce healthcare costs.
- **Mental Health Diversion and Forensic Capacity:** Study the impact of recent efforts by the legislature to divert individuals with serious mental illness from criminal justice settings and prevent recidivism. Study and make recommendations to address the state's ongoing need for inpatient forensic capacity, including the impact of expanding community inpatient psychiatric beds.
- **Improving Access to Care through TeleHealth:** Study and make recommendations on the use of tele-monitoring and telemedicine services to improve outcomes for adults and children with complex medical needs and for people in correctional facilities. Examine service implementation barriers and impact of access to health care services in rural areas.
- **DFPS Changes:** Monitor the implementation of changes made by the Department of Family and Protective Services, Child Protective Services on child safety, workforce retention, prevention, and permanency and their impact.
- **Medicaid Fraud Reduction:** Monitor the implementation of initiatives to reduce Medicaid fraud, waste and abuse, and other cost containment strategies, including examining the processes and procedures used by managed care organizations to address Medicaid fraud, waste and abuse; and make recommendations needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation.

## **Criminal Justice Committee**

- **Jail Safety Standards:** Evaluate the current guidelines and practices in county and municipal jails relating to the health, welfare, and safety of those in custody. Review law enforcement and correctional officer training, with emphasis on mental health and de-escalation. Study the effectiveness of existing oversight mechanisms to enforce jail standards; making recommendations for policies and procedures if needed. Examine the current mental health and substance use treatment services and medical resources offered in county, municipal, and state correctional facilities.
- **Decriminalization of School Truancy:** Monitor the implementation of decriminalizing school truancy and the response of school districts to take steps to address truancy before referring students to court and make recommendations needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation.
- **Civil Commitment Program Changes:** Monitor the implementation of changes made to the operation of the Civil Commitment program in Texas and make recommendations needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation.
- **Juvenile Justice Department Progress:** Monitor the implementation of Texas Juvenile Justice Department and progress towards planning for regionalization of the youth population, creating specialized programs, and implementing established sentencing schemes and make recommendations needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation.

## **Education Committee**

- **School Choice:** Study other states' school choice programs and implementation process with regard to their impact on student academics, local district budgets, education savings accounts, and tax credit scholarships programs. Recommend best choice plan.
- **Teacher Preparation, Retention, and Shortages:** Study teacher shortage and retention issues in Texas and examine the cause of shortages in special education educators. Recommend educator preparation improvements and ways to increase certification rates. (Joint Charge with Senate Higher Education)
- **Efficiency/Productivity Review:** Conduct a comprehensive performance review of all public schools in Texas to look for ways to improve efficiency,

productivity, and student academic outcomes. Study performance-based funding mechanisms to finance achievement, not attendance. Identify any state mandates that limit performance, district and campus innovation, and efficiency and productivity.

- **Teacher-Student Relationships/Student Safety:** Study the recent rise of inappropriate teacher-student relationships. Determine what recommendations, if any, are needed to improve student safety. Study and report on training and educating school employees to prevent unsafe behavior.
- **Security Cameras in Special Education Settings:** Monitor the implementation of program to require the placement and use of video cameras in self-contained classrooms or other setting providing special education services to students. Recommend actions needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation.

### **Higher Education Committee**

- **Preparation of high school students for postsecondary education with 60x30TX:** Monitor the ongoing implementation of HB 5 (2013), and examine projections of Texas high school students prepared to enter postsecondary education and workforce training. Recommend strategies and best practices to align HB 5 with the 60x30TX higher education plan, including, but not limited to, dual credit, credit transferability, and fields of study. (Joint Charge with Senate Education)
- **Baccalaureate degrees at public community colleges:** Study regional workforce needs and recommend whether regional workforce needs should be applied to allow public community colleges to offer certain needed baccalaureate degrees.
- **Disaster Preparedness Planning and Coordination:** Review natural disaster preparedness planning and coordination. Evaluate whether existing local government planning and federal funding processes make the most of regional coordination to reconstruct housing and infrastructure. If needed, recommend ways to improve disaster recovery efficiency.
- **Supreme Court ICP Ruling:** Review existing statute and rules that govern the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs in light of the recent Supreme Court decision in Inclusive Communities Project, Inc. vs. TDHCA, et al. and recommend if any modifications are necessary to conform to the decision.

## **Finance Committee**

- **Coordinating Behavioral Health Services and Expenditures:** Monitor the state's progress in coordinating behavioral health services and expenditures across state government. Identify ways state agencies that provide mental health services are collaborating and taking steps to eliminate redundancy, create efficiency, utilize best practices, ensure optimal service delivery, and demonstrate expenditures are coordinated and in line with a behavioral health statewide strategic plan. Identify barriers that prevent the coordination of behavioral health services. Make recommendations to maximize use of state funding for mental health.
- **HHSC Rider 50:** Monitor the Sunset Advisory Commission's review Health and Human Services Commission Rider 50 regarding the reduction of emergency department use during non-emergency situations and make recommendations needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation.

Only key charges relevant to Texas with developmental disabilities are listed above. Full Senate Interim Charges can be found at <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/>.

\*Schedules for Senate committee hearings are posted at <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/Senate/events.php>.